

THE DIVINE RETICENCE

THE ESSEX HALL LECTURE, 1927

by

WILLARD L. SPERRY

M.A., D.D.

DEAN OF THE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL IN
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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*Dean of the Theological School
in Harvard University*

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WE read in the book of Exodus that the children of Israel were guided in their wanderings through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. During the day this cloud obscured the tabernacle over which it hung. During the night it irradiated that tabernacle. We are apparently to understand that the cloud itself was at all times one and the same. Its altered aspects were due to the changing circumstances of the human scene. When the world was bathed in light, the cloud appeared, by contrast, a thing of darkness.

When the world was sunk in night the cloud, seen against the blackness of the sky, was a thing of fire.

Coleridge found in this old story a suggestive symbol for the uses of religion. He says that certain great ideas which always attend religion have this double aspect. When the garish light of certainty falls upon our world, these ideas serve only to obscure the religious issue, making a mystery where there is no mystery. But when certainty is denied and the darkness of deep perplexity envelops us, these ideas take on a strange luminousness. Instead of obscuring the issues of religion, they indicate and irradiate them. The ideas themselves remain constant, they cloud or clarify religion as

our own characters and circumstances change.

The general conception of a divine reticence would seem to be one of these ideas with a dual aspect. At one time it is a hindrance to our religious insights. At another time it is the very condition of our seeing. Whether it stands to us as a pillar of cloud by day or of fire by night depends upon the face of our age and our human lot.

As a matter of good conscience, I must acknowledge the source of the actual wording of the subject. I owe it to a very old man, who, twenty years ago, was my senior in the ministry of a New England parish. He was a man of catholic intellectual interests and of an

insatiable hunger for the certainties of the truth. He stood in the succession of those Pilgrim spirits who believe that "more light is yet to break."

The faith of his maturer years had that kind of childlike simplicity which one often meets in fine old age. The beautiful vicissitude of a good life had disciplined and deepened a native optimism into the poet's passionate intuition that all which we behold is full of blessing. The joy of a clear conscience made him a fit companion of the true, the beautiful and the good. When he came out of his study into his pulpit he habitually spoke to us of some striking way in which he thought the Everlasting Goodness was further revealing itself to man through

the steadily expanding knowledge of Nature and the larger fortunes of history.

One day, however, he said a different thing. What he said seemed, for the moment, quite out of character. We had been sitting in his study, busy with parish shop talk, for which he had the small necessary patience. Then evidently his mind returned to its native place, and he was silent for a long while. At last, apropos of nothing whatsoever, and as though speaking to himself rather than to another, he said, "The longer I live the more I am impressed by the reticence of God."

The simple candour of those words gave them their beauty and wonder. His eighty years of tireless study gave them

their weight. Their instant appeal to one's own perplexities gave them their truth. Any intimate knowledge of human nature will persuade us that this old man was not alone with his final sober second thoughts about the divine reticence. All men are dogmatic in their youth. Men of meagre minds become more dogmatic as the years pass. But men of larger natures tend to become more agnostic with the coming of ripe old age. They seem to be increasingly convinced that beyond the flaming walls of the world there is a great mystery which is the homeland of the human soul, but just what that mystery is they are more and more reluctant to say. When the veil at last begins to wear very thin between the

worlds, the noisy affirmations of dogmatism give place to a brooding and expectant silence. The divine revelation is more and more swathed about by the divine reticence.

This constant experience of good men finds a place, then, in every great theological system. You must measure the maturity and the adequacy of any theological system, not merely by what it has to say of God's self-revelation, but also by what it has to say of the reticence of God. The greatest systems are here the most candid and the most humble. As with the scientists, so with the saints, the wisest are the most reserved.

We do the manifestors and mediators and interpreters of God a grievous wrong

if we think of them only as defenders of the divine revelation. They are also with one accord the apologists of the divine reticence. They have spoken of a God whom no man has ever seen. They have written his name in characters which they never took upon their lips. They have conceded to him ways which are not our ways and thoughts which are not our thoughts. Giving thanks that God had matched them with his hour, they have still left to him the day and the hour which no man knows. Their common chanted faith has never wanted the minor refrain, "Nescio, nescio—I know not, oh, I know not."

Our Protestantism has its immediate theological point of departure in that

magnificent structure which we know as Calvinism. The strain of the dogmatist was strong in John Calvin, but the strain of the agnostic was equally strong. It is no modern manual of scepticism, but Calvin's "Institutes of the Christian Religion," which says, "God treats sparingly of his essence. . . . His essence is indeed incomprehensible by us. . . . Wherefore let us willingly leave to God the knowledge of his own essence."

There is no more seductive, plausible, reasonable position for a human being to hold than that of a perfect agnosticism. The noblest souls have felt the validity, even the apparent necessity, of this position most strongly. It was one of the world's wisest men who said, "Once have

I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further." It was one of the world's boldest prophets who said, "I will not make mention of him nor speak any more in his name."

But if this perfect agnosticism is the one seductive conclusion to the whole matter of religion, it is also the one position that is denied to man. In those hours when we invoke it and profess it the universe as whirlwind bids us gird up our loins, stand upon our feet like men and give answer; the words which we have stifled in our hearts are as a burning fire shut up in our bones, and we are weary with forbearing and cannot stay. If the divine reticence is the most inscrutable fact in our world, so also it is

the most imperious. It is the sum and statement of the beautiful enmity of the mystery of things.

This whole idea has passed into the conventional body of our religious thinking, primarily through the strait gate of a single sentence in the prophecy of Isaiah, "Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel." The Vulgate translates the original by the daring phrase, "*Deus Absconditus*." The Latin translation is, if anything, more accurate than the English. The Hebrew verb implies not a God who has never revealed himself, but a God who, having revealed himself, has subsequently withdrawn himself. If you transliterate the Latin, you must say of such a God that he has

“absconded,” taking with him the trust that we once vested in him, leaving his place empty and ourselves beggared of our certainties. This is a very bold metaphor, but for all its audacity it has its origins in the common experiences of man. Much of the graver business of living consists in a process of adjusting ourselves to a world in which blessed realities are given only to be withdrawn.

This riddle of life’s religiously barren times is the constant concern of all the manuals of Christian devotion. It is the central theme of the “Imitation of Christ.” Poetry, as described in a classical definition, is the effort to recover the spiritual presence of absent things. The “Ode on Intimations of Immortality” is

written in defence of this thesis. Many of the noblest sermons of our tradition are addressed to this perplexity. One remembers Martineau's wise and tender words about "The Tides of the Spirit."

The Fourth Gospel is nothing but a drama of the divine revelation succeeded by the divine reticence. It is the attempt of the Christian community to reconcile itself to the expedient absence of Christ, to discover some spirit and method of comfort and help for those hours when the promise of his speedy second coming faded away into the light of common day. The Johannine doctrine of the divine reticence as stated in the terms of the delayed Parousia hovers over the early Church, first as a pillar of cloud by

day, then as a pillar of fire by night. Wherever we range in life or letters we come upon this constant problem of our human reference and reconciliation to the absence of what was once a spiritual presence.

Since time would fail us even to indicate the rich profusion of the developments of this theme, we shall do well to ponder it in some single statement. The doctrine of the "Deus Absconditus" finds perhaps its most explicit elaboration in the writings of Blaise Pascal. That phrase is there in so many words, and more than once. The idea which lies behind it is the master key to all Pascal's thought.

One reads Pascal to-day marvelling

that the passage of nearly three hundred years has dimmed the page so little. His thoughts have not slipped into the "dark backward and abysm of time." They seem newly minted. We do not find in Pascal what we profess to find in many other writers, timeless statements of eternal truths. We find our own latest meditations in our own vernacular. There is very little in the history of Christian doctrine as astounding as Pascal's anticipation in the seventeenth century of the religious issues of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Pascal was a rigorous scientist struggling to become an authentic saint. He did not have at hand all the facts with which we are now familiar, or the technical vocabulary with

which we handle those facts, but he had the scientific mind as we now know it, and as mathematician and physicist he saw the type of religious problem which must more and more be faced by that person whom we describe in each succeeding age as "the modern man."

Pascal saw the boundaries of time and space receding into infinity. He saw that this pushing back of the mystery by the extending sequences of natural causation would mean a God who was once removed from our immediate concern. The fathers had believed in a God patently manifest in every circumstance of life. The sons would have to describe that God as a "Deus Absconditus." The revelation of God would give place to the

reticence of God. All this Pascal saw clearly, felt poignantly, and dealt with prophetically.

It would be hard, then, to find an account of the actual place of an intelligent man in his universe in this year of grace 1927 more accurate than that which first saw the light in the original edition of Pascal's "Thoughts," published in 1670. There is very little theology written in 1670 that will stand reading to-day. The more amazing, then, was the prophetic strain of modernity in that man's mind. Listen to Pascal's account of man's condition and man's dilemma :

"When I see the blindness and the misery of man, when I survey the whole dumb universe, and man

without light, left to himself, and lost as it were in this corner of the universe, not knowing who has placed him here, what he has come to do, what will become of him when he dies, and incapable of any knowledge whatsoever, I fall into terror like that of a man who, having been carried in his sleep to an island desert and terrible, should awake ignorant of his whereabouts, and with no means of escape. . . .

“ When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, the small space which I fill or even can see, engulfed in the immensity of spaces whereof I know nothing, and which know nothing of me, I am frightened and wonder that I am here rather than there. The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me. . . .

“I look on all sides and see nothing but obscurity, nature offers me nothing but matter for doubt and disquiet. Did I see nothing there which marked a Divinity I should decide not to believe him. Did I see everywhere the marks of a Creator, I should rest peacefully in faith. But seeing too much to deny and too little to affirm, my state is pitiful, and I have a hundred times wished that if God upheld nature, he would mark the fact unequivocally, but that if the signs which she gives of a God are fallacious, she would wholly suppress them, that she would either say all or nothing, that I might see what part I should take. . . .

“Vere tu es Deus Absconditus.”

Such is Pascal's account of the lot of man. None of us will take exception

to it. We can only subscribe to it with an admiring wonder at its vivid clarity and its fidelity to our own experience.

Mr. Havelock Ellis says in one of his essays that it is more important in this world to find a man who knows what your problem is than to find a man who knows the answer to the problem. We have in Pascal one who knows what our human problem is. It is, however, a thankless business to state hard problems and then to shirk the answer. Pascal cannot be charged with shirking an attempted answer to the problem which he puts himself and us. He is not to be blamed if his solution is not as clear and satisfactory as his statement. Any man who knows life and

who has a dramatic imagination is better at putting problems than at answering them. Plainly we cannot subscribe to all the details of Pascal's answer to his own riddle and ours. We are not sure that we fully understand what he meant that answer to be. Reading Pascal is like being out in a thunderstorm at night. His thoughts come as blinding flashes of epigram and paradox, with silence and darkness between. But in so far as we can see our way through Pascal's argument it seems to run in something after this manner :

This dual aspect of God who is at one time revealed and at another time hidden indicates, not a truth about God, but a truth about man. Man is a creature of

two natures. The orthodox Christological account of the case in the Chalcedonian Definition holds good not only of Christ, but of all men. We are to seek and to find the two natures in the one person of every human being of us. Man is a chaos, a contradiction, a prodigy, a paradox, he is the glory and the offscouring of the universe. His greatness and his littleness are the two most obvious facts of him. He is the stage, the scene, the victim of a civil warfare within his own person. His only hope of peace lies in carrying this civil war to some conclusion. He must not cry, too soon, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace." The greatest wrong which we can do ourselves is to sign some armistice which leaves the issue

open and unconcluded. It is the part of wisdom, rather than of folly, to press these contrasts to the end.

Now religion is a relationship in which this contrast is heightened, not minimized. In the presence of God we become increasingly aware both of the good in us and of the evil. It must be God who saves us in the end, but the relationship to him, which we call religion, is the actual saving experience, and must be rightly construed and conducted on its own account. Our contribution to the religious relationship is the attitude and act of faith. Faith is not a mechanically necessitated and automatic response to the divine address. It is a free, voluntary, creative energy of the human soul.

We have found Coleridge moving along a parallel line of thought. Coleridge says in one place, "The medium by which spirits understand each other is . . . the freedom which they possess in common, as the common ethereal element of their being, the tremulous reciprocations of which propagate themselves even to the inmost soul. Where the spirit of man is not filled with the consciousness of freedom, all spiritual intercourse is interrupted, not only with others, but with himself." Pascal is of the same mind. He carries his doctrine of freedom way over to the left, in order to save it from determinism on the right, and describes it, as you will remember, in that famous passage about the gambler's chance. "God

is or he is not. To which side shall we incline? Reason can determine nothing about it. There is an infinite gulf fixed between us. A game is playing at the extremity of this infinite distance in which heads or tails may turn up. What will you wager? You must wager; this depends not on your will, you are embarked in the affair. Which will you choose?" Pascal would seem to be no stranger to the mythical city of "Smokeover."

Religion requires faith, then, as man's necessary contribution to the communion and commerce with God, and any faith which merits the name presupposes an area and exercise of an indubitable freedom. Man has what William James once called a real and necessitated option.

It is inevitable, therefore, that God, who is the object of our faith, shall present a double aspect. His revelation and his reticence are both required. Neither one alone suffices for a religion. Both must be there. And in so far as faith is in our human experience the initial act which invites the divine response, that act is addressed to the "Deus Absconditus"—the hidden God, rather than to the revealed God.

That is, therefore, the best religion in which the paradox and contradictions of human nature are for the moment universalized. God leaves the final truth of himself to wander veiled among men. There is in this matter of religion evidence enough to condemn, not enough to con-

vince. There is light enough for those who are willing to venture the way, but obscurity enough to deter the faint-hearted. The great religions are always those in which this paradox is most clearly stated, and the greatest of these religions is Christianity, with its universal doctrine of the two natures in the one person. In Pascal's own words, "God being thus hidden, every religion which does not say that God is hidden is not the true religion, and every religion which does not show the reason of it is unedifying. Our religion does all this. 'Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself.' "

Of these contrasts within the Christian doctrines, both of God and of man, we are all of us fully aware. The edifying

reason would seem to lie in the necessity for defending the freedom of faith, and of giving reality and substance to its adventures. You cannot have it both ways in religion. You cannot have that kind of certitude which is based upon the knowledge derived from an uninterrupted and incessant revelation, and at the same time retain your own creative contribution to that significant relationship which we designate as the religious life.

Now all this is either the merest juggling with words, the verbal play of a supremely skilful phrase-maker, or else it points the way to the truth of the matter. Pascal, as I read him, was not intent upon attempting to augment or even to celebrate the glory of God. He was not

intent upon celebrating the dignity of man, or, again, upon defaming human nature. He was concerned to defend the reality and the integrity of the religious life as such. If one may say so, he seems to have been more interested in religion than in God or man. This interest in the relationship, rather than in the partners to the relationship, is probably a secondary interest, and one which implies a certain sophistication. It is plainly not the trust of a little child, but is the ingenuity of a very self-conscious and adroit mind.

Yet for all this hint of a secondary concern and a want of child-likeness, there is no least trace of childishness in Pascal's thinking, the childishness which is so often required to do pious substitute

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duty for the real thing. In his own way the man was after something very true and right, and what he was after seems to be that highly desirable somewhat which bears in our own time the name of liberal religion. We ought never to identify liberalism with latitudinarianism. Liberalism in religion is not a matter of breaking with old creeds and writing new creeds or no creeds. Religious liberalism is something more radical than that. It is the conviction that the religious life is its own end. In this strict usage of the word, Pascal was a religious liberal. His doctrine of the dual nature of man was a forced deduction from the plain human fact. His doctrine of the divine revelation and the divine reticence was a

corollary of his doctrine of man. And he was primarily concerned to define and to establish rightly the relationship between the two, believing what all truly religious liberals must believe, that the communion of man with God is the one great end of all our human striving and seeking.

In his concern for a correct definition of the religious relationship we can sympathize with him. The whole intercourse may be vitiated and frustrated, wanting some true account of the nature of the relationship in itself. One certainly ought not to plunge unreflecting and unprepared into the intimate and permanent relationships of human life. No prevision can entirely anticipate the experience. But

every significant human relationship is capable of reduction to some general terms. There are issues to be dealt with, rights to be defended, duties to be performed, and dispassionate prior reflection upon these issues, rights, and duties is a great help to the correct conduct of the concrete experience. So with religion. This relationship is capable and deserving of reflection in and for itself. To understand how we may be related and ought to be related to God is to be in the way of finding the true God. In the want of any such understanding, the partner to our spiritual ventures may turn out to be an idol or an illusion. The matter of method is one of first importance.

The divine reticence, then, is our human

opportunity to be religious men. It is because a faith which is really vital requires as its major premise the doctrine of the "Deus Absconditus," that Pascal took this stone which the builders of more superficial systems had rejected and made it the cornerstone of his own structure, the keystone of his arch. Or, if we may revert to our original figure, this was the way in which he changed the pillar of cloud into the pillar of fire, not by introducing distinctions into the ultimate Mystery, but by observing the duality of his own nature, the necessities imposed upon him and the opportunities opened to him by that duality. It is, then, in the spirit of this seventeenth-century Frenchman that the modern poet writes :

When in the dim beginning of the years,
God mixed in man the raptures and the fears
And scattered through his brain the starry stuff,
He said, " Behold, yet this is not enough,
For I must test his spirit, to make sure
That he can dare and vision and endure.

" I will withdraw my face,
Veil me in shadow for a certain space,
And leave behind only a broken clue,
A crevice where the glory glimmers through,
Some whisper from the sky,
Some footprint in the road to track me by.

" I will leave man to make the fateful guess,
Will leave him torn between the no and yes,
Leave him unresting till he rests in me,
Drawn upward by the choice that makes him free,
Leave him in tragic loneliness to choose,
With all his life to win or lose."

This is the religion of Blaise Pascal.
It is essentially what we mean and the
most that we can mean by that conven-
tional phrase about a " liberal religion."

Only those religions are illiberal which make no place for the divine reticence, religions which guarantee certainties that the universe fails to redeem, religions which from the outset make the act of faith a play-acting and a farce. To defend the divine mystery and to give reality to our human believing we not only concede, we worship the "Deus Absconditus."

Now I have chosen to say these things, not because they suggest a timeless truth of all religion, although there is such a truth in them, but more particularly because they have immediate reference to our own religious circumstance. We are living in a time in human history when the clouds return after the rain. The sky

apparently will be overcast for the rest of our lifetime. We shall not recover the clarity of vision or the certainties which we had, or thought we had, in other years. Of this fact one is made daily conscious in his soberer talk with you. I beg you to believe that you are not without comrades in America. There are many profoundly unhappy men there, unhappy at the ironies of history, deeply disquieted at the course of events, and in no wise deceived by the momentary great prosperity of their people. There are many men whose thoughts are far longer than the superficial signs of the times would seem to suggest, men who understand quite clearly to what pass religion and all that we mean by religion is come. Will

you, then, of your charity concede me the assumption common to us both, that the former times of the divine revelation have been succeeded for a season by the times of the divine reticence? No statement of our common circumstance can be truer than this, that we are by no means as certain as once we were what God is about in his world or what he intends. This is as true among the "liberals" who have cherished humane and Utopian expectations as with those conservatives who have professed confidence in the propositions of the elder orthodoxy. Our once simple and sufficient faith in the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the progress of the race upwards and onwards forever is no longer a hymn in celebration

of a theological victory, it is, if anything, a battle cry at the thick of the fight. We know, as we have never known before, that in those tremendous affirmations we are

Nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe ;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form.

We shall discover before we put off our armour of what stuff our religion is.

If it is the right stuff, we shall issue conquerors, though not unscarred from our adventure. One of the finest definitions of Christianity which I know is that of George Tyrrell—Christianity is an ultimate optimism founded upon a provisional pessimism. Or, if you choose to

restate those words in the terms of our immediate concern, Christianity is an ultimate certainty founded on a provisional perplexity. It is the vision which follows a long vigil at the altar of the Unknown God. It is the ultimate response of the Mystery to our devotion to the divine reticence.

The "Deus Absconditus," then, has become, in one form or another, the immediate object of our meditations. This idea, like the pillar of cloud, seems at first to obscure what we once believed to be the area of theological certainty. We are compelled to challenge our own axioms. The things which once seemed so clear and plain to us are now withheld from our sight. This hidden God is

tacitly conceded in all our present worship, and in certain quarters he is explicitly professed. If you have followed the comments upon the drift of Christian thought in contemporary Germany, you know that this very phrase, the "Deus Absconditus," has been made again the cornerstone and keystone of the theology of those younger men who have been disillusioned by the events of the near past and who despair of the complacent humanities of liberal and critical Protestantism in the Germany of the last two generations. It is natural as it was inevitable that the whole doctrine of God and conception of religion should suffer there this change, that the divine reticence should succeed to a divine revelation, which had

been construed in terms "human-all-too-human." But what has become already explicit in the theology of the vanquished is implicit in the religion of the victor. Karl Barth and his followers may receive us all, each in his own way, into the communion of those who now wait upon the divine reticence.

This waiting upon the divine reticence must mean the willingness to subject our traditional convictions, not only to the revision of experience, but to the residual mysteries. One sometimes wonders whether the stuff of liberal theology was not in danger of becoming itself one more of the world's platitudes and conventions. It was said by Emerson that every deliverer becomes in turn a new tyrant.

Perhaps we have occasion to be thankful that the reticence of God, as now felt, promises to deliver us from what might have become the tyranny of a liberalism which had lost the power to criticize itself, and had slipped into that slough of all falsehood, a subtle self-deception. In the naked necessity which now confronts us of recovering the permanent religious genius of liberalism, rather than of reaffirming its platitudes, we may find the salvation of our souls.

There is a fine passage in "The Return of the Native" in which Thomas Hardy describes the face of his hero, Clym Yeobright. "In Clym Yeobright's face," he says, "could be dimly seen the typical countenance of the future. People al-

ready feel that a man who lives without disturbing a curve of feature, or setting a mark of mental concern anywhere upon himself, is too far removed from modern perceptiveness to be a modern type." One is conscious of something of this quality in the faces which look down from the frescoes of the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel. They make one aware of the thoughtfulness of those renascence times, and of the cost of thought to the men who lived through them. They are not anxious or apprehensive faces, but plainly they look upon a world in which great mysteries asked for hard thinking.

"There is," says Walter Bagehot, "no pain like the pain of a new idea." All Michael Angelo's faces bear the marks of

that mental pain. The faces of the men who wrote our Bible must have borne, unless their works betray them, such pain, the pain of new ideas of God. The books of Job and Jeremiah and Galatians are so much scar tissue.

Many of us have held it inevitable that other men whom we have thought less candid, less courageous, less wise than ourselves should have to endure that pain. In our complacency we had not thought it possible that we must endure that pain likewise. But the strong perception of the reticence of God, as we now experience it, intimates strangely that this pain may have to be our pain, pain in getting a new idea of God, and pain in telling it.

What the new and more adequate ideas of God may be we cannot say. Each man has his own intimation as to the correction of his mistaken beliefs and the fulfilment of his inadequate beliefs. Plainly new and true ideas of God will mean, in their corollaries for man, altered conceptions of State and Church and race and class, which, when translated into action, must be costly to those who venture them in faith. We may shrink from that venture because it is so uniformly painful.

And yet there is no man of us confronted by the imperiousness of the divine reticence and by the want of his world but knows that what he stands to lose to-day in the area of old theological certainty he

stands to gain in the interior reality of the religious life. Under the conditions of contemporary life the relationship itself comes alive again as a great transaction in the area of freedom, the freedom of the divine grace which knows the times and seasons of its own self-revelation, the freedom of the man who finds in the divine reticence his own religious occasion and opportunity. The perception of the reticence of God, then, is the perpetual death of inadequate theologies, the perpetual rebirth of the religious spirit.

Naked belief in God the Omnipotent,
Omniscient, Omnipresent, sears too much
The sense of conscious creatures to be borne.
It were the seeing Him no flesh shall dare.
Some think, Creation's meant to show Him forth :
I say it's meant to hide Him all it can.

Its use in Time is to environ us,
Our breath, our drop of dew, with shield enough
Against that sight till we can bear its stress.
Under a vertical sun, the exposed brain
And lidless eye, and disemprisoned heart
Less certainly would wither up at once
Than mind, confronted with the truth of Him.
But time and sense case-harden us to live;
The feeblest sense is trusted most; the child
Feels God a moment, ichors o'er the place,
Plays on and grows to be a man like us.
With me, faith means perpetual unbelief
Kept quiet like the snake neath Michael's foot,
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.

It is in this manner that the deep
mystery of the reticence of God which
first appears as a pillar of cloud in the
daytime, becomes by night a pillar of fire.

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